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Matthew 6:24

No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be loyal to the one and have contempt for the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.

Treasure 2: The Problem with Two Masters

Pop Quiz: which President is famous for saying, “a house divided against itself cannot stand!”?

Answer: Abraham Lincoln — but did you know that Honest Abe was really quoting Jesus?!!

My friends, as we enter week 2 of our church-wide focus on treasure, we come again to the Gospel of Matthew, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, hearing the call from Jesus to examine where our treasure lies – where we spend our money, time, and energy. And in order to do this, Jesus says we must look at our hearts. Do we have un-divided hearts, or are we torn apart by too many obligations and masters? The Bible is full of texts talking about our hearts and they many pulls upon them.

In Deuteronomy 4, we are called to love God with our whole heart, mind, and strength. This verse is called the “Shema” and it is the first Bible verse a Jewish child learns. The Hebrew word “Shema” means hear, and people of a Jewish faith believe it is of utmost importance to listen for God’s direction on our hearts. Because only when God is in the proper place in our hearts, can the rest of life fall into place. This text would have been so important to Jesus, as a young Jewish boy. Matthew 22, Mark 12, and Luke 10 all record Jesus teaching this prayer to his followers.

There are numerous challenges in scripture regarding the loyalties of the human heart. In Exodus 34:14 we are warned that God is a jealous God, who wants not just a piece of our hearts but all of it. Proverbs 3 says “Trust in the Lord with your WHOLE heart – all of it!” Proverbs 4 says, “Above all else guard your heart, for EVERYTHING you do flows from it!” Matthew 5 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.” In Jeremiah 29, the prophet said, “When you search for me, you will find me; if you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me, says the Lord.” With all your heart. Jeremiah and Jesus aren’t talking about just seeking God when we are in a time of need, but seeking God for the whole living of our lives.

Our hearts face great division in the world today. In his book *Treasure*, Pastor Jacob Armstrong mentions one example. Have you ever seen those vanity license plates, issued I suppose to parents whose children go to different colleges? The plates include the logos of two rival college football teams, and down the middle it says: A House Divided.¹ My in-laws have that flag in their front yard. Travis's Dad is a huge Georgia Tech fan, and his long-time girlfriend Kathy was a professor at the University of Georgia. Right by their mailbox, in the middle of a patch of pansies flies a flag, split down the middle, with a yellow jacket on one side and a bulldog on the other, again with the phrase "A House Divided." And they are really divided – they go to the Georgia-Georgia Tech game every year and sit on opposite sides! Some of you may know that we always spend Thanksgiving week with my in-laws.... And "The Big Game" usually falls right around Thanksgiving. It gets... intense!

A house divided. This phrase usually reminds people of Abraham Lincoln's famous speech in 1858. Lincoln was speaking about a nation divided on the issue of slavery. Quoting Jesus, President Lincoln made a plea for unity to a country whose hearts were deeply divided. This is the same call we hear from our Gospel text today – a call from Jesus to a people whose hearts are deeply divided.

In the Gospel of Mark chapter 3, Jesus says, "*If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand.*"² Jesus is telling us, in other words, that competing allegiances in a kingdom, a house, or a heart will lead to destruction. Division leads to war in which either there is constant strife, or one side wins out.

Last week, we were challenged to consider where we are investing our hearts. I encouraged us all to look at where we spend our time, money, and energy, so we could see where our hearts are invested. If you weren't with us last week, one easy way to check this investment is to look at your checkbook and your calendar. In doing so, most of us would find that our hearts indeed are divided. We have said yes to too many commitments, signed too many contracts, and swiped too many credit cards. And so now we must work to pay off a bunch of stuff that doesn't make us happy – at least in the long run.

Jesus says in our text today from Matthew 6 that no one can serve two masters. A person trying to do so will inevitably love one master and hate the other, be devoted to one master and despise the other. Jesus says that we can't serve both God and money. My

¹ *Treasure*, chapter 2

² Mark 3:24 NRSV

friends, as we examine our lives today, we may see that we are trying to serve many things in this life, that we have many more than two masters calling for hearts!

My friends, take a moment right now, and ask yourself:
What does it mean to seek God with my whole heart?
What would it mean for God truly to be the master of my life?

When we are serving two, three, or ten masters... and are dividing our hearts among them, we are not living as God intends us to. This may explain why we resent, or even hate the things that pull us away from our intended treasure. We can end up hating our job, or our boss, because they have become an unintended master in our lives. Does this mean you can't make money? No! Does this mean you can't have a healthy relationship with money? No! But it does mean that you can't SERVE God and money. They can't both be your master. You can't live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ and the lordship of money; you must choose.

My friends, I struggled to find a good illustration of this. Honestly, I didn't want to share what I am about to share with you. (Travis didn't want me to share it either.) But the longer I am your pastor, the more you will find that I am willing to be vulnerable and honest and confess my own struggles and shortcomings, especially for the sake of the Gospel, so here goes...

In our first year of marriage, we had it good. Travis was making a very good salary — at the top of his industry. The money I made from student pastoring was like icing on a very rich chocolate cake. We did not have to struggle like most young newlyweds. It was easy to tithe. In fact, we comfortably gave away more than 10% of our income. We had the beautiful luxury of being able to give whenever our hearts were moved to give. We could buy really nice gifts for the people we love, (I could buy lots of pairs of cute shoes!) and I had a ball decorating our first home and hosting fancy dinner parties.

But this comfort was short lived. When I graduated from seminary and was appointed to Shandon Methodist, we moved from Atlanta to Columbia. We moved hundreds of miles away from all of Trav's family and our friends. It was hard to find the support we needed. We put our house in Atlanta up for sale. It had an expensive mortgage payment so we prayed it would sell quickly. It didn't. Then Travis lost his job of over 15 years. He started applying for all the telecom jobs he could find in South Carolina. No one was hiring. So we prayed, and we prayed, and we prayed.

A year later, nothing had improved. We missed family and friends terribly. Travis was still on unemployment. We were still making a hefty mortgage payment we really could

not afford on my one income. And I have to be honest, I worried constantly about money. I could say how excited I was to be in full-time parish ministry – and truly mean it. I could talk about my joy in living out God’s call on my life as a pastor - because there certainly was joy... But my heart was struggling.

And I can’t tie this one up with a neat little bow. There’s not some glamorous Chip & Joanna Gaines style reveal about how it all got better. It just did. Travis eventually got a job, and then a better job (though it will never pay like Atlanta did) The house finally sold. We adjusted our spending. As life has continued on, other very expensive blessings have entered our lives and we’ve continued to adapt.

BUT: I knew then, and I know now, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that God has called me to be a pastor. And I trust that God will always equip us to do what God calls us to do. So, eventually, I stopped worrying. My heart turned. I found peace. There is no pull from another master. My heart is not divided.

My friends, this is what I wish for you. God doesn’t want shared allegiance. God doesn’t want a piece of your life. God wants to be everything to you. And I promise, if you make Jesus Christ your Lord and Master, the other allegiances will find their proper place. You still may be a faithful spouse, dedicated employee, loyal friend. But you will not have a heart, or house, or life that’s divided. You will be standing on the firm ground of faith.

This week, I want us to think together:

What does it mean to seek God with my whole heart?

What would it take for God truly to become the sole master of my life?

What are your answers to those questions? If you aren’t sure, or even if you are, I’d love to talk with you further about the place of Jesus Christ in your life. My door is always open. In the meantime I will be praying for each of you. Let’s pray together now...

LET US PRAY: Almighty God, our creator redeemer sustainer, we come to you with so many things that claim our time, our energy, our resources, our very lives. We are easily drawn away from serving you by the enticements of the world for wealth, ease, and comfort. Just like the young man in the scriptures, we are owned by our possessions, held captive by our treasures. But you seek to transform our lives from captivity to freedom. Help us to place our lives and our trust in you. Give us courage and strength to truly be your disciples. For we ask this in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.